

Johnny get angry, Johnny get mad

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

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If you were a squeamish, responsible parent in the late '80s and deemed Robocop an inappropriate choice for a potential game conversion given its gory, explicit violence, portrayal of drugs and 18 certificate, you'd likely have been frothing at the mouth when bidding began for the Nightbreed license.

Nightbreed is the 18-rated movie translation of Clive Barker's lurid fantasy horror novella, Cabal, written and directed by the main man himself and released in 1990. For anyone unfamiliar with his body of work, you can think of Barker as Stephen King without the safety net. As shocking and revolting as some people find King's horror, Barker makes it seem perfectly rationale and tame.

Originally envisioned as a monster mythology piece with a view towards humanising the objects of our fear, thanks to the production company, Morgan Creek, it rapidly descended

into a throwaway, mainstream slasher film featuring a cardboard cutout bogeyman lacking a driving impetus.

Following numerous slapdash edits and a title change intended to make Cabal more commercial, Nightbreed was whittled down from a two and a half hour sprawling saga to just one hundred and two minutes, losing much of the convoluted plot's nuance and characters' motivations in the process.

It's really no wonder Morgan Creek hadn't the faintest clue how to market the off-the-wall movie given the department's chief hadn't seen it all because it "disgusted and distressed" him.

Even the trailer was savagely molested by the MPAA who insisted no monster footage could be included! It was finally approved after a dozen rejections, completely misrepresenting Clive's oeuvre.

Barker endured a further stinging blow when his plan to develop a number of sequels - turning Cabal into the Star Wars of the underworld - fell through due to the underwhelming response from the critics to the trilogy's inception. From a budget of \$11m it recouped just \$8.8m, making an evolution of the story infeasible. It wasn't until as recently as 2014 that Clive's dream finally came true; to reassemble the 'lost' pieces of the puzzle to forge the definitive version - the director's cut - of his adaptation.



Briefly, the plot focuses on Aaron Boone, a young mechanic haunted by recurring dreams of a mysterious underworld known as Midian; an alien, ghoulish landscape populated by a community of startlingly deformed creatures. Cowering beneath this ominous and seemingly abandoned Necropolis graveyard, anything goes; grotesque beasts are accepted and mortal sins forgiven. Which is precisely what leads Boone to seek out the location of the fabled site in the real world - redemption for crimes he is manipulated into believing he has committed.



Boone: Then it's true.

Peloquin: Everything is true. God's an Astronaut. Oz is Over the Rainbow, and Midian is where the monsters live.



Boone - at the behest of his girlfriend, singer Lori (well, lip-syncer really) - has been undergoing psychiatric treatment for his disturbing dreams. This brings him under the watchful 'guidance' of psychoanalyst, Dr. Phillip Decker, played by venerated movie director, David Cronenberg. Unfortunately for Boone, Decker turns out to be a psychopathic serial killer who spies an opportunity to pin these deranged crimes on his patient. Having previously planted incriminating thoughts in his subconscious, Decker ensures Boone's falsified inclinations towards murder are recorded for posterity.



Decker - aka The Mask - prescribes what Boone *believes* to be lithium, supposedly to alleviate his mental anguish, and threatens to reveal his audio tapes to the police if Boone doesn't confess first. Before he has chance, Boone - high on LSD - wanders into the path of an oncoming HGV. Amazingly he lands himself in hospital still breathing, on account of the truck breaking in time. Here he meets Narcisse, another

distressed patient who experiences recurring visions of Midian. Narcisse assumes Boone is there to test his allegiance to Midian and so bends over backwards to help. Accordingly, Narcisse proves himself by supplying Boone with directions to reach the covert haunt American archaeologist, William G. Dever, tells us is in the "northwest Arabian Peninsula, on the east shore of the Gulf of Aqaba on the Red Sea".

Using a pair of steel thumb blades Narcisse removes most of his own hair and face - as you do - before being heavily sedated by medical staff. Boone takes this as his cue to make a hasty exit from the hospital destined for the fabled sanctuary, before this latest atrocity can be dumped on his doorstep.



At the gates to Midian one of the 'breed' inhabitants - Peloquin - takes great delight in informing Boone that as he can smell his innocent he must have been duped into conceding his murderous persona. This revelation culminates in the only reasonable course of action; feeling a bit peckish Peloquin attempts to tuck into Boone's shoulder, transforming him into a member of his netherworldly clan. I expect he's a big Bram Stoker fan.



Kinski: (having captured Boone) If we eat him, we break the law!

Peloquin: Oh, fudge the law! I want meat!

In the meantime, Decker, determined to cover his tracks, arrives with the local neo-Nazi police force aka The Sons of the Free. Feigning Boone's possession of a concealed

weapon, the police react on auto-pilot, eliminating the 'threat' by riddling Boone with bullets.

Pronounced not simply dead, but thoroughly terminated, Boone is taken to the morgue where his body undergoes a post-mortem enduring further mutilation. Nevertheless, miraculously, as soon as the coast is clear Boone returns from the other side thanks to his newly conferred immortality. Suddenly finding himself between worlds and with nowhere left to turn Boone is drawn back to Midian. Post-metamorphosis he's invested into the community by Nightbreed leader, Dirk Lylesburg, via a sacred baptismal ritual expedited by the blood of their deity, Baphomet.



Rallied by Decker and Police Captain Eigerman, the authorised mob form a militia and storm the Nightbreed's underground lair.

Captain Eigerman: You are a freak and a cannibal and you've come to the wrong town.



In response, Boone, having learned of the prophecy dictating his pivotal role in the salvation of the outcasts encourages his flock to fight fire with fire to protect their fragile race. A dwindling clique hunted close to extinction by humans terrified of anything deviant, unorthodox and inexplicable.

Dr. Philip K. Decker: (chuckles) I'm not one of them... I'm here to destroy them.

(wearily)

Dr. Philip K. Decker: See I've cleaned up a lot of breeders, families like cesspools; filth making filth making filth. And I did it over and over and over again, but it was all leading me here... I was born to destroy them... and the breed together.





It's only when Boone has the brainwave to release the hounds... I mean *Berzerkers* that the implausible good guys begin to make inroads. Berzerkers - for the record - are former Nightbreed who have lost the struggle to maintain their sanity, became erratically feral and thus had to be imprisoned even beneath Midian for the safety of the majority. Amidst the chaos Decker is killed (or is he?), while the battle to preserve Midian rages on.



Boone: Look we can make it out... but we need fighters.

Lylesberg: We're not warriors.

Boone: What about the Berserkers?

Lylesberg: Madness, they're uncontrollable.

Boone: Better yet... let them out. We are the tribes of the moon... you said so.

Lylesberg: (reminiscing) The tribes of the moon.

(pauses then reluctantly)

Lylesberg: I'll release them.

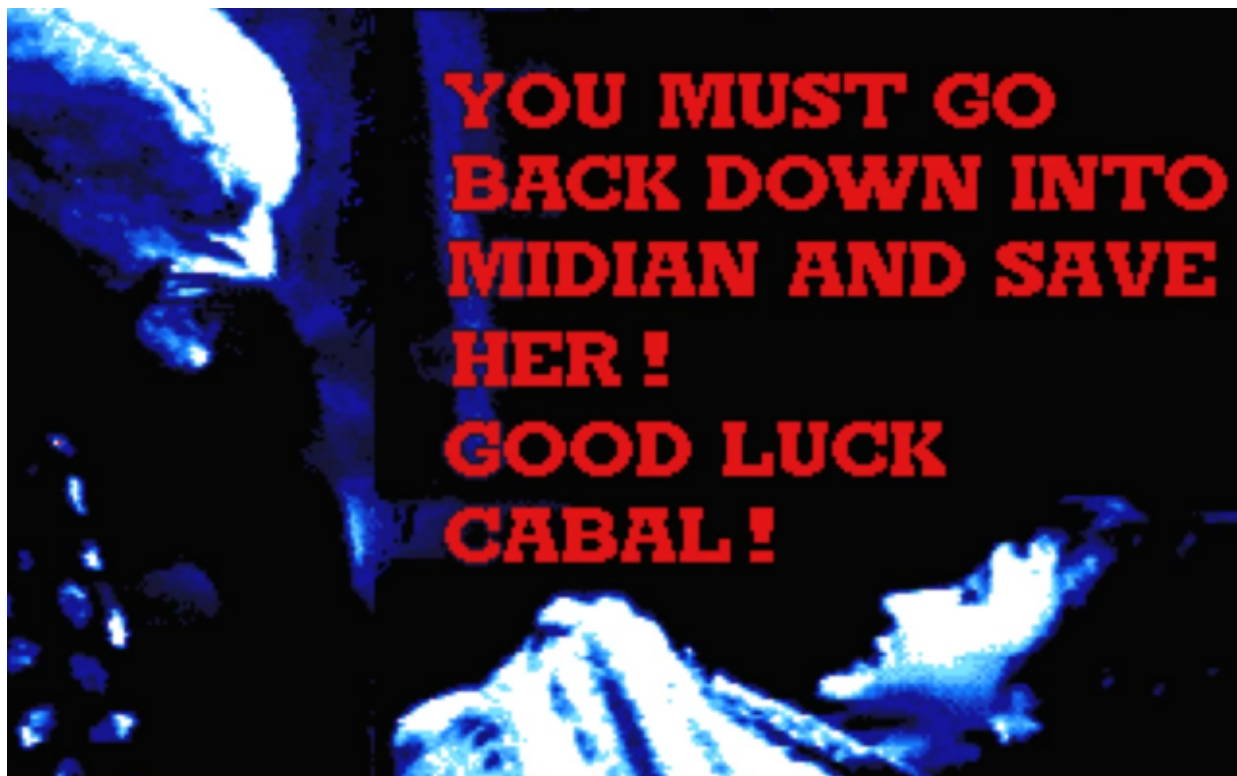


In contrast, Baphomet foresees the need for Midian to be decimated and the breed to reform elsewhere in order to grow stronger. Boone is the man nominated to rise to the challenge, though is unexpectedly joined by girlfriend, Lori, his self-appointed support network. Despite his protests, Lori sacrifices her ephemeral human existence - harakiri style - so she can join Boone on his pilgrimage, rather than waiting for him to return, by which stage she may be old and withered.

**CABAL ! THE MASK
HAS YOUR
GIRLFRIEND LORI !**



**YOU MUST GO
BACK DOWN INTO
MIDIAN AND SAVE
HER !
GOOD LUCK
CABAL !**



Complicating matters - and explaining some of the elements incorporated into the game, which we'll get to later - an alternative ending exists. Actually, the alternative finale is the one already covered above, that being the director's cut. This isn't the same as the 'Cabal cut', the embodiment of *all* the recovered footage bolted together, clocking in at one hundred and fifty-five minutes. Even so, they both share the same conclusion, the one that differs to the producer-mauled theatrical release. In the theatrical release, the key difference is that Ashberry (an alcoholic priest who I haven't mentioned until now because he plays a fairly minor role) revives Decker using the blood of Baphomet and decrees vengeance upon the Nightbreed and their leader.

Ashberry: I saw their god master... He burned me! I want to burn him back!

(as Decker screams... returning to life)

Ashberry: Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah...



Ocean, determined to make the most of their license to translate the as-yet-unreleased movie to the small screen set out to develop three accompanying games; an action title (which I'll be focusing on here), an interactive movie, and an RPG. All but the latter came to fruition, the RPG concept having been shelved due to the movie's poor performance at the box office. Bundled with the Amiga 500 Screen Gems pack was the adventure incarnation of Nightbreed along with Back to the Future II, Days of Thunder, Shadow of the Beast II and Deluxe Paint II. It was available for sale between September 1990 and July 1991, and isn't generally fondly remembered. That isn't to say the action game is any better, just more interesting in my view.

"They're going for a 15 certificate. It's more a creature movie. And they're just creatures, not gory... there's going to be more creatures in this than any other movie. We are getting every cooperation from the film company, we're there practically weekly. We've access to storyboards."

Gary Bracey (The Games Machine, issue 18, May 1989)

Reviews at the time were largely mediocre, except for one, *The One* in fact. That said, even *they* downgraded their overzealous initial verdict to 45% when reassessing Nightbreed for the budget re-release in July 1992.

"Nightbreed is one of the more competent arcade adventures available. It's not particularly original - the 'explore-shoot-and-collect' formula has been with us for years - but it's been executed well, with a healthy combination of action and exploration."

80% - The One (October 1990)

"This is a game you could probably get into if you happened to find yourself with the odd rainy Tuesday afternoon, but it probably wouldn't have much of a role beyond that particular afternoon. I really wouldn't bother to tell the truth.

Respectable enough, but nothing actually to recommend it. Apart, possibly, from the exciting thunder and lightning effects."

58% - Amiga Power (September 1992)

"Hmm, out of the two, I definitely prefer the Interactive game over the arcade one. Mainly because it seems to capture the atmosphere more. The arcade game is a very simple and uninspiring affair, with a very repetitive game task and poor controls. The beat 'em up sections are tiresome and can be difficult to control, and I found myself losing energy needlessly. Not bad, but it could have been a lot better."

67% - Amiga Action (October 1990)



Sheffield-based Impact Software (formerly 'Painting By Numbers') were commissioned by Ocean to develop both games in tandem while the movie itself was still a work in progress. That being the case, the developers - coders Chris Kerry, and Mark Rogers and graphicicians, John Beard and Steve Kerry - wouldn't have had the benefit of watching the finished movie for inspiration. Perhaps better still, the former Gremlin employees (1984 - 1988) were given complete access to the Pinewood movie set and draft versions of the script, treating the amiable crew like consultants. Image Animation who worked on the movies' animatronic and stop-motion special effects even got involved in bringing the *pixels* to life, hence their credit in the game's opening title screen.



"I actually was in the movie - right in the background of one scene, for about half a second (I went through the bloody thing frame-by-frame so I could see it). I was really upset as they wouldn't even consider me for an Academy Award nomination!! :P"

Gary Bracey, Ocean's former product director

Gary's bracing himself

"Ocean's Software Development Manager, genial (Phew! Could have been a nasty typing error there. Ed.) Gary Bracey is still reeling at the news of the delay in his much-awaited screen debut. 'Cos the release of the horror movie Night Breed has been postponed until next Easter. As Ocean has the license to the chiller, we rang the company to get Gary's reaction, hoping he'd say he was gutted - unfortunately, he didn't! Night Breed has

got 20 monsters, which is the largest assortment ever on screen since On The Buses - The Movie."

Zero issue 2 (December 1989)

As the games were being developed in conjunction with the movie, any celluloid setbacks resulted in similar repercussions. An ETA of Christmas 1989 was Ocean's initial goal, although (eight months into production) an in-depth preview didn't emerge until February 1990, while the finished product wouldn't be on the shelves before October of the same year. By this stage the theatrical cut of the movie - originally slated for an Autumn 1989 release - had left the stables six months earlier.

I mention this mainly because it validates some of the quirky variations between the game and movie. Which movie? There are three. Well exactly! Impact weren't to know what would make it into the final cut, and by the time the movie eventually surfaced it would have been too late to synchronise the two mediums. This explains why fans of the original, abridged movie won't recognise some of the monsters seen in the game, and might wonder how Decker comes to be resurrected.

During development, the movies' one hundred macabre monsters were whittled down to just thirty to keep the project manageable. Similarly, the action game's one hundred individual screens were constructed using three sets of block components across three levels, comprised of one hundred blocks each. What this meant in practice is that the levels could be procedurally generated rather than individually hand-drawn; while an enormous time-saver for the developers, hardly a Boone, sorry I mean *boon*, for discerning gamers who appreciate attention to detail and going the extra mile. Given that Boone's animation alone consists of thirty frames, it would appear that some effort

towards fulfilling the latter had been made, although somehow the main sprite's movement still seems primitive by 1990 standards.





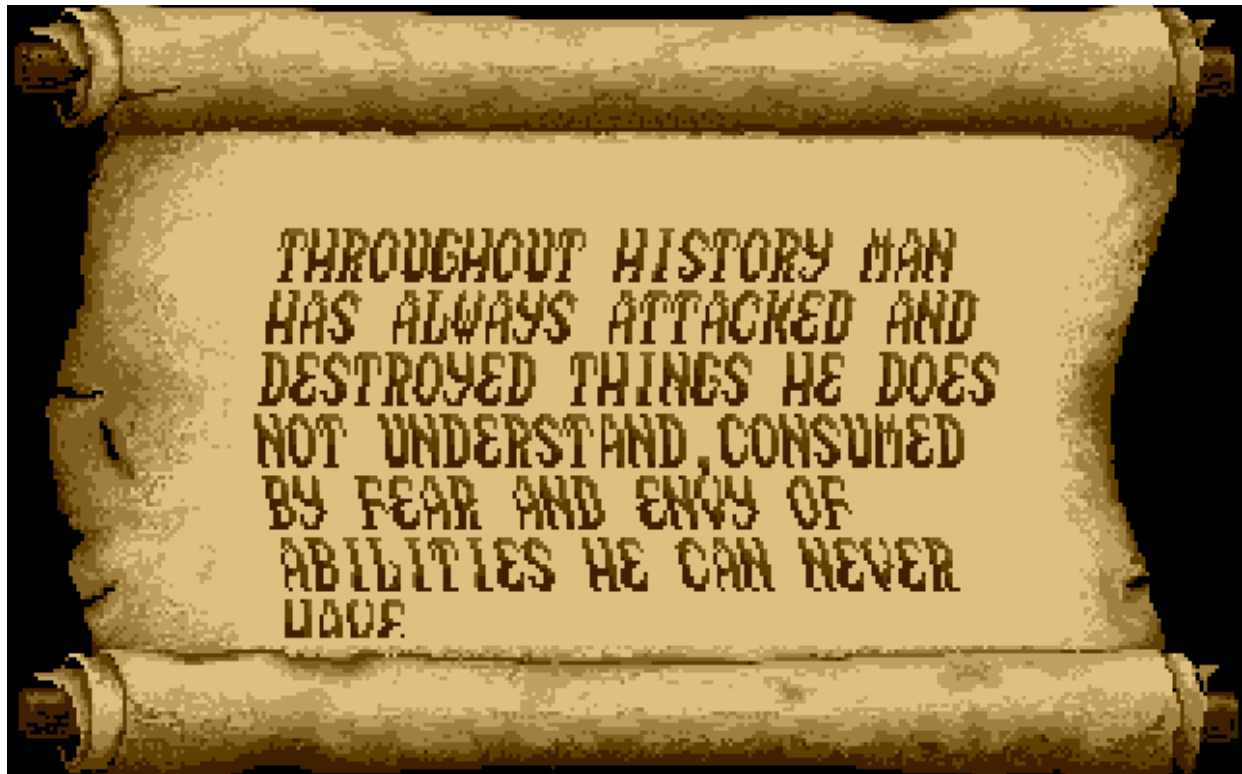
*Did I mention the action game was also available in Amstrad, Atari ST, Commodore 64, DOS, and ZX Spectrum flavour?
Tick!*







As the sound effects were the last component of the movie to be created, Impact were forced to source their samples elsewhere due to time constraints. Instead, these were acquired from the 'Sound Ideas' digital sound bank maintained by Piccadilly Radio in Manchester. These are strangely deafening, comprising the bulk of the in-game audio. Music only plays over the introductory back-story relayed via a (literally) scrolling scroll. I say *music*, except it's really no more than a very brief, clunky loop (by Jonathan Dunn who can do much better) with no effort made to blend together the lead in and out. This results in a stilted, jarring, jumping record kind of effect, which does nothing to promote a portentous ambience.



As we explore Impact's interpretation of Necropolis and Midian we're bombarded by some highly immersive and atmospheric thunderclaps and lightning effects. Perfect *above* ground, though their clout wears extremely thin when they can still be heard whilst deep below the surface of the graveyard! Worse still, our barefoot running sound effect appears to be the clippety-clap of a horse's hooves. How did that get past QC?



Some brief voice samples are also on offer, however, it's not clear from where these emanated. They aren't recognisable as direct samples from the movie, not to me at least.

Explosion sound effects employed can also be heard in Run the Gauntlet, another game developed by Impact Software, the year prior to Nightbreed. Possibly they'd paid a visit to the Sound Ideas studio previously and decided to recycle them. That's not uncommon in the corner-cutting software business.



As you might expect, the action game skips the movie's build-up launching right into the scenes set at the graveyard where we're pitted against The Mask, Sons of the Free, Lude and Neckend.



Dr. Philip K. Decker: Miss Winston, *everybody* has a secret face!



Our horizontally scrolling mission entails descending to the depths of the Nightbreed's dilapidated abode, traversing rope bridges and battling against Berserkers and even more Sons of the Free to reach Baphomet's chamber. Once baptised into the faith we can press the t key to transform into Cabal.



In this mode - for a limited period - our avatar develops the facial whorls seen in the movie and we grow in strength and resilience; kicks and punches become more potent, our jumps project us further and we can endure more punishment before turning into one of our three skulls, representing our life tally.



When in ordinary Boone mode our best bet is stealing a gun from one of the fallen, corrupt police officers. You can't miss them, they're half the size of Boone himself, as are the grenades the Sons of the Free hurl in your direction! Replacement ammo is equally proportioned, presumably, so it doesn't get lost in the scenery, and is recognisable.



Sons of the Free are armed with machine guns as well as flame-throwers and guided missile launchers, yet are far from the *only* threat you'll encounter. Berzerkers as well as the very creatures you're risking life and limb to rescue mercilessly attack with whatever means available, even if that entails launching their own heads at you! Someone should really have let this be known to the manual writer who informs us that, "The Nightbreed are mostly passive - you have to avoid them rather than fight them."

Part of our burden - as in the movie - is to release the Berserkers. When we achieve this by opening a door, nothing escapes, and we carry on as though we're taking a leisurely stroll in the park. Not to worry - we've been fighting them all along, even before we went anywhere near their prison!

There's only really a single Berzerker type in the game, contrary to the two entries they receive in the manual. The "large and lumbering" Berzerker who "walks up to you and punches you with his big fist" who you must whack off-screen is actually the same sprite as the "head monster", a "large Berserker that hits you, but when you hit it its head flies around hurling insults at you".



According to the manual, the remainder of the 'harmless' Nightbreed includes...

"Fatman - he gets in your way and moves very slowly. He also vomits and this is poisonous if touched."

This would be 'Vasty Moses' (as featured on the cover of the Nightbreed Chronicles novel), a former freak-show performer in a travelling circus according to the Nightbreed comic (you don't look shocked?). Or could they be referring to that rather suave gentleman, Beloit Motto?

"Snakeman - he sits there and rattles his tail. If you go near him he may strike you pushing you back off the screen. It must be punched and kicked off the screen."

"Big fly - this swoops down and knocks you over if you don't kneel to avoid it. It cannot be harmed."



"Flying teeth - this flies on the screen at head height and if you don't duck it knocks you over."



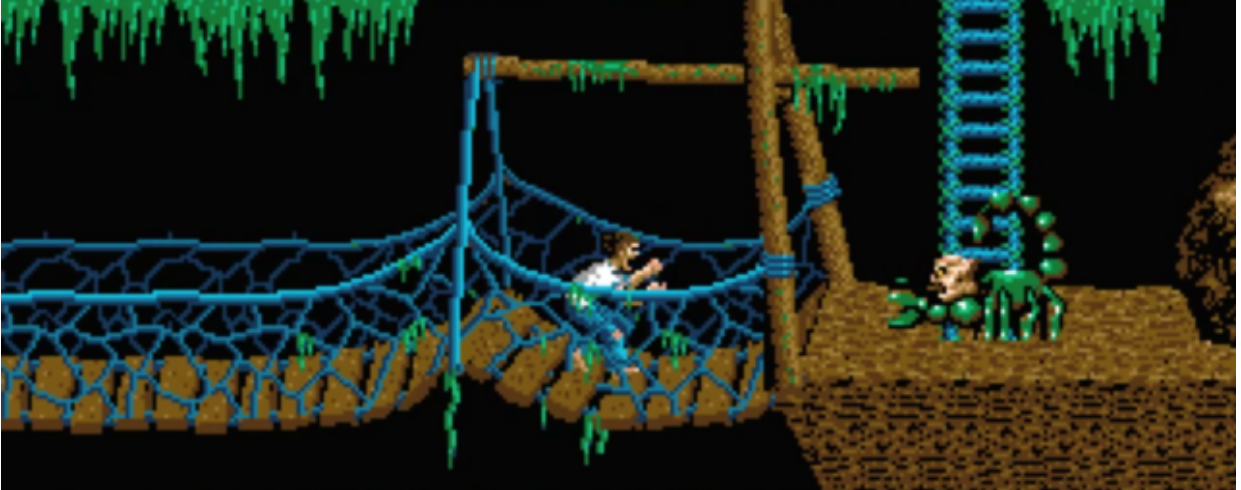
"Roof crawler - crawls along the roof dropping rocks on you."



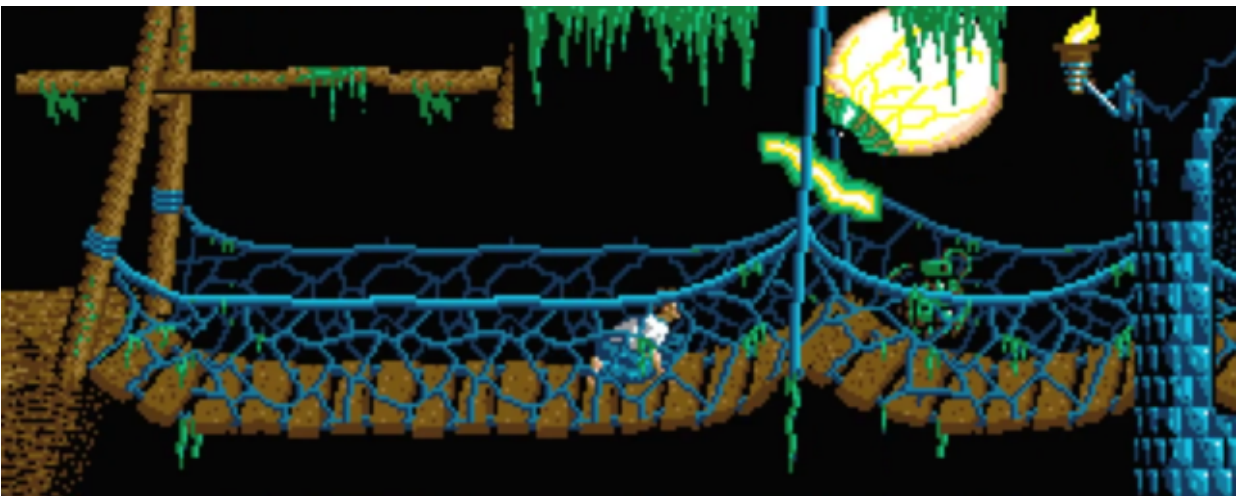
"Hopper - hops around the room and if it hits you knocks you over."



"Scorpion man - a scorpion with a man's head, it creeps towards you and strikes you with his tail."



"Eyeball monster - this is a huge eyeball which moves about the top of the screen and tries to look into your eyes. When it does a ray comes out and if you don't look away it harms you."



Also seen in the game as a leopard statue is Diadaria who would have ridden her Mezzick-Muul steed in the movie had she not been cut.



Flicking back to our trusty manual, we also find a description of the five various types of Sons of the Free who can "either appear on the ground or can drop from above":-

"Hand to hand - they run towards you and start punching and kicking."

"Handgun - they fire several shots at you until they run out of bullets or you get near them. They then revert to hand to hand combat. (If you kill them and their gun still has bullets left you can collect it.)"

"Machine gun - they fire a machine gun at you in bursts but if you get too close or they want to stop they revert to hand to hand combat."

"Rocket launcher - they kneel down with the launcher and a sight appears over the Son of the Free and homes in on you. If the sight locks onto you then the rocket is launched and is very difficult to avoid."

"Flame thrower - they try to stay at a certain distance from you moving backwards and forwards firing their flame throwers. The flame either goes straight (jump over them) or upwards (duck). They move slower than you so

you can get near them. They then revert to hand to hand combat."

It's so nice when a game comes with a helpful, comprehensive manual. At the very least it saves me loads of time explaining every last detail. Here are the other hazards you'll encounter along the way during your Decker-decking quest:-

"Mines - step on these and you are blown into the air. The surrounding area is also destroyed."

"Time bombs are thrown on from the side and tick away and explode if you do not get to them in time."



"Grenades are thrown in and travel across the screen and explode on contact if you do not jump over them."

"Ground-fires flare up and burn if touched."

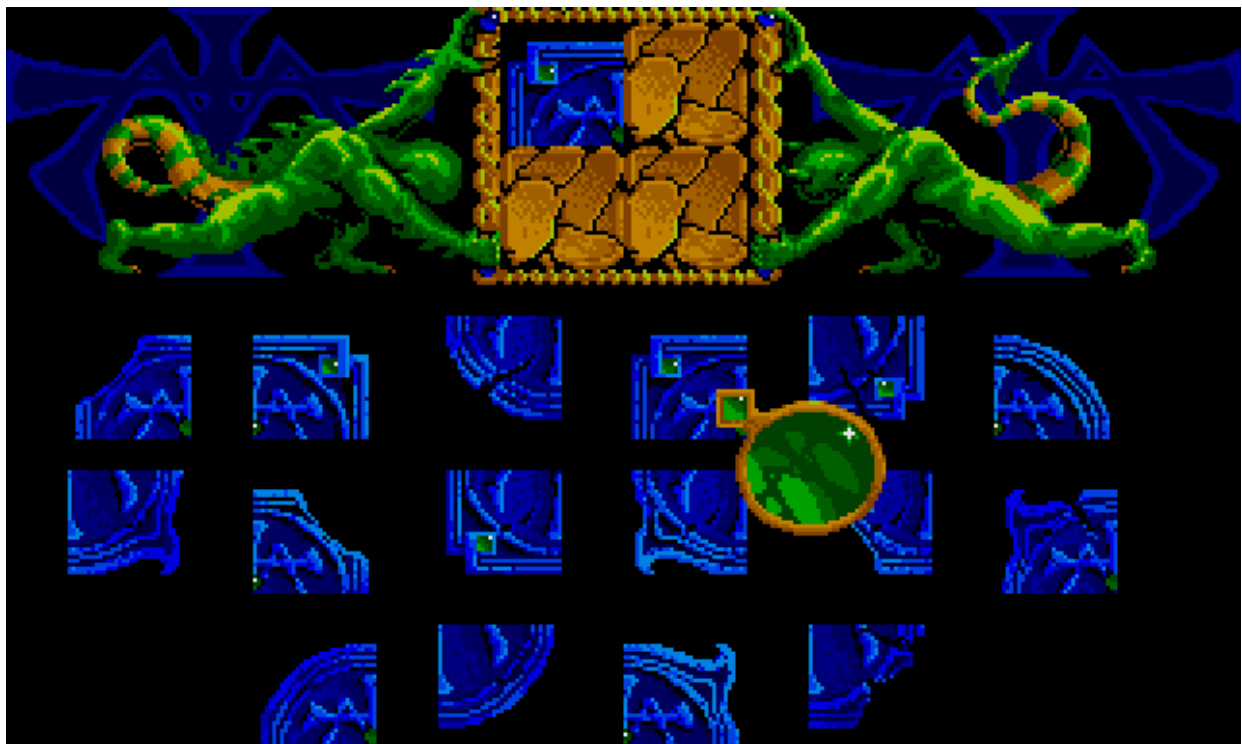
"Falling fires are like ground fires but drop from above."

"Falling rocks hurt if you get hit."

"Berserkers' hands grab you from below and knock you over."

"Energy droplets drift upwards from the ground and will replenish your energy on contact." - Hey, that's not a threat, you can't kid me!

Unexplored areas are accessed by collecting keys, and returned to later by reconstructing a four-piece pass key from the game's menu. These can be found adorning the walls as murals should you have the time to jot them down amidst the barrage of fire, bullets and hell-spawn.



The remainder of the challenge revolves around killing Decker (twice), rescuing our girlfriend, Lori (who has been kidnapped by Decker), and returning to the surface. At which point we flee our erupting bolt-hole for pastures new, thereby fulfilling our destiny as foretold by the ancient prophecies.

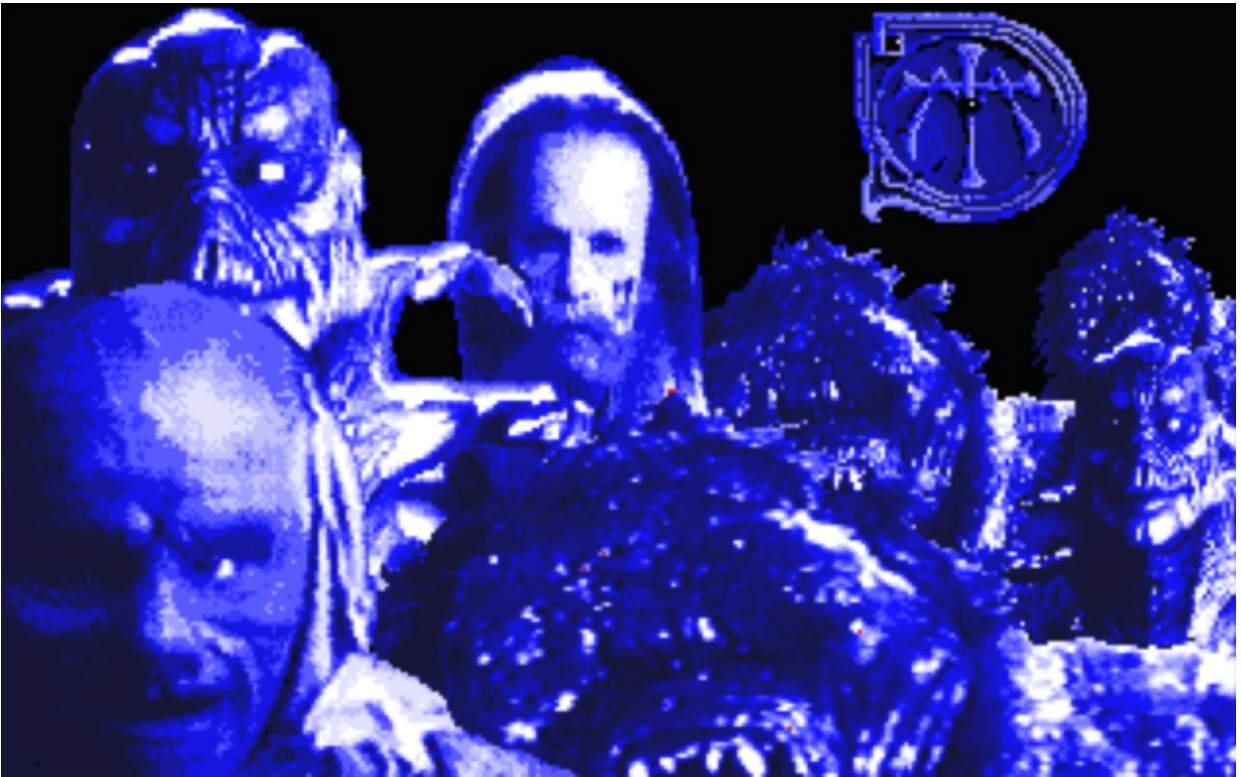
WELL DONE CABAL!



**YOU HAVE
FULFILLED YOUR DESTINY!**

**MIDIAN LIES DESTROYED!
BUT YOU HAVE SAVED
THE NIGHTBREED!**







This is made infinitely more cumbersome by the shoddy controls. Almost every action has to be performed by first pressing down the fire button, followed by a directional joystick movement, making rapid responses impractical.

Neither up or fire is jump, you'll need to do both simultaneously. Punching is executed by pushing left/right and fire, while kick is diagonally down and fire. Shooting your gun is simpler as that's just activated with the fire button alone, except you'll need to be standing perfectly still first or you'll punch instead. Totally useless for hitting a copper on the other side of the screen as he machine-guns you to death.

Actually, pulling off any manoeuvre at all is a hit or miss affair, often leaving you floundering in a spray of bullets just when you thought you were in the perfect position to deliver a fatal blow.



Our running motion too is overly lethargic so escaping a threat when unarmed is unnecessarily difficult. If we *do* stand and fight, our standard punch is too ineffectual to warrant the energy expended, leaving just the legs as our mainstay attack. These make all the difference - it's actually possible to kick monsters through the wall, without even damaging it.

Nightbreed is another one of those games where the title is permanently on display should you forget what it is you're playing. Perfect for Alzheimer's sufferers then! This wouldn't be so bad except coupled with the top part of the HUD it occupies half of the playfield. And speaking of wasted space, Mexico with his extended leathery neck and collar of hands appears twice in one of the finale screens. Oops!

Nightbreed, when it crept onto the silver screen resembling a tale from the crypt, was like nothing we'd ever witnessed before. Portraying humans as the menacing villains, and the bloodcurdling refugees as sympathetic and redeemable, Barker turned hackneyed monster movies on their head. The sheer scope of creativity injected into his parade of ogres is arguably unparalleled in this much-maligned genre. Precisely the reason a legion of fans are waiting with bated breath yet another revision of Nightbreed, this time to include an additional twelve minutes of previously unseen footage, in

addition to an HD revamp of the Cabal Cut's ropey VHS recordings.

It's a shame equivalent plaudits can't be lavished upon the accompanying action game. This amounts to *everything* we'd seen before at the time, much of which had been executed far more competently. It's a bog-standard button-masher, lacking any variety between levels and hamstrung by broken controls. A far cry from the wanton aberration of the source material.